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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 004868

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KJUS FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH DEPUTIES PROTEST INCARCERATION OF NYT
JOURNALIST JUDITH MILLER

Classified By: DCM Alex Wolff for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: French National Assembly members Pierre Lellouche and Francois Loncle visited the Embassy July 12 to protest the imprisonment of New York Times journalist Judith Miller. They also requested access to Miller in prison. Following the meeting Lellouche and Loncle met across the street from the Embassy with journalists who had gathered in response to their previously issued press communique. In view of the communique and the press conference, both of which came to Embassy's attention shortly before meeting with the DCM was to take place, the DCM declined to meet with Lellouche and Loncle and arranged for the delegation to be received by our Information Officer. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) DCM agreed to meet July 11 with National Assembly members Pierre Lellouche (Center-right UMP - a long-time Embassy contact) and Francois Loncle (Socialist Party) to receive their protest concerning the imprisonment of NYT journalist Judith Miller. Prior to the meeting, we learned from the Press that Lellouche and Loncle had issued a press statement announcing the meeting at the Embassy, outlining the points they would make, and giving notice that they would reply to press questions outside the Embassy following the meeting. DCM contacted Lellouche to tell him that we objected to his attempt to use his meeting in this way -- which was not in keeping with longstanding, close relationship the Embassy and he have enjoyed. DCM informed him that because of the way he had misled us, and since his intent was to score media points, he had asked the Embassy IO to meet with the two deputies in his stead.

¶3. (U) Lellouche and Loncle, accompanied by Lellouche's diplomatic advisor who acted as notetaker, met with IO as arranged. Poloff also attended as notetaker. After complaining about the meeting being "downgraded," something he characterized as an unfriendly act to friends of the United States, Lellouche proceeded to state that he had been shocked by Miller's incarceration. Lellouche said he was saddened to see the liberty of the press being put into question. Lellouche continued that he and Loncle, probably accompanied by Robert Menard of Reporters Without Borders, wanted to arrange to see Miller in prison. Lellouche said that he had met with Miller a few weeks ago and knew her well. Loncle associated himself with Lellouche's remarks, saying that there was a long tradition of journalists' rights to protect their sources. He said he was shocked by Miller's incarceration, which gave a bad image of the United States. Other countries, he said, would see this action as a stamp of approval to imprison journalists. Lellouche noted that he had been in Doha last week and that the Miller story was being covered extensively by al-Jazeera.

¶4. (U) IO responded that the U.S. had a long history of protecting the rights of journalists, including their right to protect sources. These rights, she said had to be balanced against national security concerns. This was not the first time, she said, that a journalist had been imprisoned. Press Officer continued that the case was before the courts. Accordingly, the Executive branch had no role in Miller's imprisonment. Lellouche responded that just as the Judiciary was independent of the Executive, the President and the Secretary were free to pronounce on the matter and should do so. Lellouche claimed that Miller was being harshly punished by the judge for her failure to cooperate, and was being denied access to books and newspapers. He indicated that he intended to communicate with the Secretary urging her to express her disapproval of the judicial decision in Miller's case. Lellouche added that the U.S. Congress should see the Miller case as a wake-up call, and pass a law to allow journalists to protect their sources. IO agreed to communicate the concerns of Lellouche and Loncle to the Department. Lellouche concluded by saying that he wanted the U.S. government to facilitate his visit to Miller, failing which, he threatened to create a scandal outside the prison gates.

¶5. (U) After leaving the Embassy, Lellouche and Loncle met with the press for about 15 minutes at the entrance to the park across the street from the Embassy.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Lellouche is a long-time Atlanticist and self-styled friend of the U.S. in the governing UMP party, Unfortunately, his political ambitions -- he is currently

beginning his run at the UMP's candidacy for Mayor of Paris -- appear to have clouded his sense of fair play.
Lellouche's original request, to meet urgently with Ambassador Stapleton was turned down on a technicality (the Ambassador has not yet presented his credentials). Were it not for that, it appears he was prepared to mislead the USG's newly arrived envoy about the full purpose of his meeting request in order to grab headlines to promote his electoral prospects.

STAPLETON